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### NH NRCS Martin Luther King Day of Service 2016

By Rachael Phillips

In honor of the Martin Luther King Day holiday, a small group of us turned our day off into a day on, serving the community. The volunteer event took place at Cross Roads House in Portsmouth, NH and included NRCS employees: Ryan DuBois, Sue Knight, and Me (Rachael Phillips), and Sarah Crowley (friend of NRCS). Cross Roads has provided services, including shelter, to the homeless since 1982. Their mission is to protect men, women and children of the Greater Seacoast area experiencing homelessness from exposure and hunger, to provide secure, transitional shelter for those seeking to break the cycle of homelessness, and to support individuals and families by providing them with the opportunity to move with dignity and purpose to stable and decent housing.



We started our day meeting with Jim who runs facilities for the 21,000 square foot building. He gave a quick tour including the history of the building. The massive facility used to be a run-down hotel until a 5 million dollar capital campaign allowed the construction of the main building that included a commercial kitchen. To begin our day, Jim set us up organizing toiletry donations while he prepared our next project. Fortunately people were very generous over the holidays and we were able to sort the remainder of the bath and body holiday donations.



Once we completed our first task, we were on to the next, this time in the family dormitory area of the building. In the wing we were working in, seven families are housed in dorm-style rooms and have access to a community bathroom, kitchen, and common area. While not fancy, it was warm, safe, and clean. Three families had just moved out and three more were scheduled to arrive the next day, so it was our job to clean the empty rooms and prepare the furniture in a configuration that would work for the family. The space was tight, but I could tell Jim was really thinking about each family's needs as he tried to calculate how many dressers he could squeeze into the space (along with all of the needed beds).



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When it was time for lunch, Cross Roads prepared a nice meal for us and Sandra Beaudry, Program Director, spoke to us more about the services that are provided at Cross Roads. While at the shelter, families have access to dental care and medical care through state programs like Families First. She explained that it is her goal to connect the folks that come through to services that they can use as they transition back to the normalcy of having a home. We watched a [touching video](#) that included interviews of residents and former residents sharing their stories and the impact and importance of Cross Roads House as they were going through very difficult periods of their life.

We finished our day by splitting into two groups. Sarah and I finished preparing the dormitories and Sue and Ryan assisted the head cook in purging items in the refrigerator that had passed expiration. One thing that was nice to see was that the holiday donations had left the freezer unit full of frozen meat that the shelter will use through the winter.

Each volunteer had a great experience and left with a greater appreciation for the things they have in their life. When asked to reflect on their experience, Sue Knight said, "The in-service day at the Cross Roads House was a very enlightening experience, and is something I'd like to do more regularly. I hope fate is kind enough to keep us on the giving, instead of the receiving end." Ryan Dubois expressed the following, "I was blown away at how organized and clean the facility was. The staff were very friendly, welcoming and thankful. The







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services provided were vast and varied. We were told that on average, after 60 days, a Cross Roads resident is transitioned into permanent apartment with a job. They truly change lives there! I enjoyed my volunteer opportunity and will be returning.”

I am glad Ryan said that because I asked the head of operations Dan Mitchell if we could make this our annual event for our Martin Luther King Day of Service and he said he would be happy to have us back every year. So if you missed out this year, you will have another chance to be a part of a beautiful day of giving back next year. I would like to give a special thank you for the kind volunteers who braved the snowy commute to help the homeless and give back to their community in honor and spirit of Martin Luther King Day.

Please contact [Rachael Phillips](#), if you would like to participate in 2017.

